For Every Boy and Girl

BORROWING TROUBLE

By H. A. HONK

IT was a still summer afternoon. The dinner was over and the work done, in a certain red farmhouse with green shutters that stood on a New England hill. Aunt Deborah had sat down in the splint-bottomed rocking-chair, with the big Bible in her lap. The name Deborah means "bee," and in character Aunt Deborah certainly was a bee; but she was an old bee now, and could not buzz around all the time. She was sometimes tired. Not for all the world would she lie down comfortably and take a nap; that would look too "shiftless." She had given little Rebecca, her orphaned grandniece, a sheet to overseam up the middle, or, as the little girl called it, to "sew up over and over and forever!" for it seeemd to the little girl an endless task.

As soon as she saw Aunt Deborah's eyes fairly shut, Rebecca stole softly out into the entry. She stood for a few moments at the open door, with the big unbleached sheet gathered up in her little arms, and looked across the valley of woods and rocky pastures, and wondered what was lying beyond the far-off hills. Then she heaved a weary sigh, and went back to her work.

Rebecca sat down on the bottom step of the stairs, and thought she would sew a piece as long as her finger, and then see what time it was. The thread knotted, and her brass thimble was too big and kept slipping off. It was slow work, and she thought, on the whole, it would be best to sew steadily fifteen minutes, as near as she could guess. So she sat down with fresh determination.

When she got up to look at the clock, only eight minutes had passed, and she felt disheartened. Then she thought she would sew a piece as long as her finger, and then see what time it was. The thread knotted, and her brass thimble was too big and kept slipping off. It was slow work, and she thought, on the whole, it would be best to sew steadily fifteen minutes, as near as she could guess. So she sat down with fresh determination.

"IT WAS ALMOST DAYLIGHT WHEN UNCLE SILAS CAME ACROSS THE LITTLE RUNAWAY."

she thought of a new plan. She counted the stair-steps; there were twelve. She divided her work with a great deal of trouble into twelve lengths and put pins in, and whenever she sewed up to a pin, she would go up a step. She began again; but the thread knotted and her thimble slipped off as often as ever, and, worse than all, her eyes watered so she could hardly see.

Rebecca fell to thinking of the great pile of eleven sheets that lay in the closet for her to seam up. Never, never, she thought, could she get them finished! It would take her until she was a grown-up woman, and there would be no time for her to learn anything else. Rebecca put down her work and went softly out of the front door to the well behind the house. She let down the old-fashioned sweep, and drew a pail of cool, sparkling water. How good it tasted!—for her throat was parched. Then she sat down on the kitchen step, and thought if Aunt Deborah would only wake up she would ask if she might go and see Almira Hackett. But then she remembered Almira had the measles, and of course Aunt Deborah wouldn't let her go. Pretty soon it would be time to take the old tin milk-pan with three holes in the bottom and go out to the chip-yard and get chips to make the fire in the fireplace. Next she must swing out the crane, and fill the tea-kettle and hang it on, and then put on pots of water for the potatoes and dishes. When that was done she must set the table for four—Uncle Silas, Aunt Deborah, Reuben, the hired man, and herself. Afterward came the dish-washing. How Rebecca hated to touch anything greasy! There was no end to dish-washing. It came three times a day. People had to eat as long as they lived, and maybe she would live to be ninety, like old Miss Betsy Rice, who, Reuben said, would never die, but just "dry up and blow away." Just to think of living to be so old, and to wash dishes, and to sew every afternoon on a sheet. Life under such circumstances was not to be borne.

Poor little Rebecca was only doing what hundreds of wiser and older people are doing all the time—borrowing trouble.

Just then the butterflies came sailing along and alighted on the lilac-bush. How nice it would be to be a butterfly and always wear beautiful golden-brown wings with blue spots over them! But maybe it would be even nicer to be a fairy gay in green and gold, and to live in the heart of a wild rose, and dance in the moonlight on the moss, as the fairies did in her book of fairy-tales that her little friend Almira Hackett had given her. It had opened up a new world to her childish vision, and when on moonlight nights, after reading by the light of the moon at her little white-curtained window—for Aunt Deborah did not allow her a light to go to bed by—she almost saw the little sprites in their revels, and no more doubted their existence than she doubted that there were angels in heaven.

Rebecca concluded after this long reverie that it would be best to go into the woods, where, she hoped, she would meet the fairy queen, who, with a wave of her golden wand, would transform her into a little fairy in green-and-gold attire. She would be sorry not to see Uncle Silas or Reuben any more, and she would like to say her good-by to Almira Hackett and a few other little girls; but the thought that fairies never did such tiresome things as wash dishes or sew seams in sheets overcame all other considerations, and she decided to go at once.

Rebecca opened the kitchen door to get her sunbonnet. It was made of green gingham, and she had been very proud of it when it was new; but now it was so faded, she felt sure she could not apply for admission into the fairy circle wearing such a forlorn-looking head-rig. She closed the door softly, went around to the front entry, crept upstairs, and got her best bonnet, gorgeous with ribbons colored by Aunt Deborah with balm blows. Rebecca was sorry, when she looked in her little looking-glass, that her nose was so red and her eyes looked as if she had been crying, for she wanted to look as well as possible. She was afraid to take a parting look at Aunt Deborah, for fear of waking her.

She could not resist the temptation to give the hated sheet a farewell kick, and then she started up the hill that rose gradually back of the house. She had to cross a pasture where the cows were, and although she was a little country girl, yet she never could get over her terror of these ferocious-looking horned animals.

Uncle Silas and Reuben were over in the east meadow, laying stone wall. She could hear Reuben calling to the oxen. She waved a parting kiss to them, and ran as fast as she could over the pasture. There was a swamp to cross, and in stepping from one tussock to another, she slipped and got her feet wet. She climbed the wall and got over into the pine woods. How solemn everything seemed here! The wind moaned and sighed through the trees; it almost made her afraid. She went farther into the woods, and sat down on a flat rock to wait for night to come. She could not remember whether her book said anything about fairies flying around in the daytime; but still they were sure to be out moonlight nights. It was growing very dark and damp, and Rebecca wished she had worn a shawl—not her best one, for that would do for some other little girl, but an old one that she wore when she went out early in the morning to feed the little chickens. As soon as she saw the fairy queen coming she could throw off the shawl, and then, in her clean calico dress and her best bonnet, she would look nice enough for admission into the fairy throng. She wished she was not so very sleepy. If there was time before moonrise, she thought she would lie down on the rock and take a nap. Finally she concluded she must sleep a little, so she took off her bonnet and laid it carefully down on the stone by her side—and that was the last that the little girl knew for several days.

Aunt Deborah woke up with a start, and looked at the clock. She had overslept, and was somewhat out of humor with herself and the world in general. She went to the kitchen, expecting to find the fire burning, the tea-kettle boiling, and the table set; but all was as it had been left after dinner. She came back and went into the entry. There lay the sheet in a little heap, but Rebecca was not to be found. She thought that the little girl had perhaps gone to the meadow to see Uncle Silas, and returned to the kitchen to see if Rebecca's sunbonnet was there; but it hung on its accustomed nail. So Aunt Deborah went upstairs to see if the child had worn her best bonnet; for the idea of any one going anywhere without a bonnet never occurred to the old lady's orderly mind. The best bonnet was gone and the mystery solved, Aunt Deborah thought: Rebecca had gone over to Almira Hackett's; and Aunt Deborah, very much displeased, began getting supper. She thought when Reuben came she would send him over for Rebecca; but was undecided whether to send her to bed without her supper or to choose another form of punishment.

The "men-folks" came up from the meadow, obedient to the summons of the horn. Aunt Deborah told them Rebecca was not to be found, and her belief that the child could be nowhere but at Almira Hackett's.

"Now, of course," said Aunt Deborah, "I shall have a sick child on my hands, just as I'm ready to spin for the winter!"

Good-humored Uncle Silas accepted his wife's idea, as he always did, and forbore to make any excuse for the child, knowing it would do no good.

Reuben hurried through his supper, secretly uneasy. He felt by no means sure that Rebecca had gone visiting without leave. He went to the Hacketts', received Mrs. Hackett's answer, that Rebecca had not been there for two weeks, with the remark, "Jest as I expected," and hurried off.

Even Aunt Deborah was too much startled by Reuben's report to remember about the milking; and the excitement increased until by two o'clock in the morning Uncle Silas, Reuben, and all the "men-folks" near were out with lanterns, torches, and bells, looking for the missing child. It was almost daylight when Uncle Silas came across the little runaway, who was lying on the flat rock where she had seated herself to wait for the fairies. She was tenderly taken home and put to bed.

Rebecca opened her eyes one afternoon in the cool, dark spare chamber. She could not, at first, make out where she was. She was sure she was not sewing a sheet "over and over," for there sat Roxa Temple, at work on one of the obnoxious articles; neither was she in fairyland, for there sat Uncle Silas and Reuben, and Reuben was pretending to keep off the flies with an apple-tree sprout—a needless work, for there was not a fly to be seen; but Reuben had a big, kind heart, and loved the little girl, and wanted an excuse to lie near her.

"Uncle Silas," said Rebecca, faintly.

Uncle Silas's heart leaped for joy, for he knew by her voice that her senses had come back, and her wild talk during her illness, of daily tasks and fairies, had given him an insight into her child-heart, and he felt that neither he nor Aunt Deborah knew much about children—about this one in particular. He remembered that Rebecca's mother had been said to be "romantic."

"Uncle Silas," said the faint little voice again, "what do fairies look like?"

"Never saw any. Do you know, Reuben?" said her uncle.

"No; I can't say I do." And then Reuben got up with a flushed face, and in sort of a choked voice said he "guessed it was about time for the milking," and went down to the barn, and stayed until the lump went out of his throat and the tears out of his eyes.

It was some time before the little girl was entirely well and strong, and by that time Aunt Deborah had made up her mind that Rebecca "had been petted so much she was sp'iled for work, and they might as well eddicate her for a teacher."

This arrangement was faithfully carried out.

To this day Rebecca does not know whether it was the illness or the pile of sheets that made her run away and seek for fairyland; but now, whenever she begins to "borrow trouble" or needlessly look at "life's long sorrows," she recalls the time when all turned out so well, and she takes a brighter view of the future.

A SPOOL SCHOOL

By Jessie Macmillan Anderson

LITTLE Ludella Smith was a dressmaker's little girl. You will think she was very lucky when I tell you that not only her mama, but her Aunt Jane and her sister Lily May, were dressmakers. How much fun she must have had making dolls' dresses out of all those pieces! Ah, but now comes the sad thing: she hadn't any dolls!

From Monday morning to Saturday night, especially Saturday night, mama and Aunt Jane and sister Lil just sewed and sewed to get things done. And it didn't do a bit of good getting one thing done, for there were always two or three other things that ought to have been done long ago. So mama would cry, and then Aunt Jane would say, "There is no use spoiling your eyes, Sarah."

Mama always sent back the "pieces"; but the rule was, "Anything smaller than your hand, Dell!" And Ludella did wish her hand would grow faster.

Yet there were mountains of tiny bits, and one big boxful Ludella had stored away under her bed—silk and satin, velvet and Bedford cord, ladies'-cloth and cheviot and camel's-hair, gingham and percale and satine, chiffon and ribbon and lace. Under the bed was another box devoted to empty spools.

Every winter afternoon, when she came home from school, Ludella would say as she opened the door, "Any more spools? Any more pieces?" Then out would come those two boxes, and dressmaker Number Four would set to work as seriously as the others.

Did I say Ludella had no dolls? What is it she keeps in box Number Two?

Big spools, little spools! Fat spools, thin spools! Spools all waist, and spools with no waist at all! All decked out in more colors than the rainbow!

Their dresses are mostly skirt, but all the easier to fit. And what a variety of skirts! Some hanging down very full and limp, in gathers; some stiff in plaited kilt; some standing straight out, just like a morning-glory upside down; bell skirts with full train, and bell skirts with demi-train; skirts with ruffle round the bottom, and skirts with panel down the side.

"Here," said Ludella, gravely—one day I listened, while her sister was trying on my new gown—"here, children, didn't you hear the bell? School's begun! Order! I have the pleasure of in-tro-ducing to you a new pupil—Laura Penelope Martindale."

Here she pulled up a jolly little twist-spool, with a flaunting pink silk skirt of the upside-down morning-glory shape, and a wide blue ribbon which was both sash and necktie.

She placed Laura Penelope at one end of a row of spools, saying:

"You'll have to begin at the foot of the class; but if you study hard and improve, you'll soon be at the head."

Then, in a squeaky voice, she made Penelope say: "Don't you have any boys in this school?" And she answered: "No; horrid, rough things! We don't *allow* 'em."

Then began the spelling lesson: "Grace Martha, spell *needle*."

"N-e *ne*, d-e-l *del*, *nedel*."

"Next!" sternly.

"N-e *ne*, d-l-e *dle*, *nedle*."

"Wrong. Next!"

"N-e-a *nea*, d-l-e *dle*, *neadle*."

And so, down the whole class, till she came to the new pupil.

"N-double-e *nee*, d-l-e *dle*, *needle*."

"That's right, Laura Penelope. You may go to the head. *You've* studied your lesson."

"Penelope's just come. I don't see when she studied it," I said, to tease the child.

"She probably paid attention to what the teacher said in the last school she was in," she answered, severely; and I fancied the other spools looked a little ashamed.

I was sorry I could not stay to hear the geography class recite; but my dress was fitted, and I had to go.

I offered to save up my spools for Ludella; but she said she would rather have me save up girls' names; she had some trouble in finding enough to go around; and she *didn't* wish to have two or three by the same name, as they had in common schools.

Ginger Snaps

By Ellen Manly

THE gingerbread man and his dear little wife,
In their little brown suits so neat,
Stood side by side by the baking-pan,
Quite out of sorts with the heat.
Their smiles were sweet, but their tempers bad,
And something happened, extremely sad.

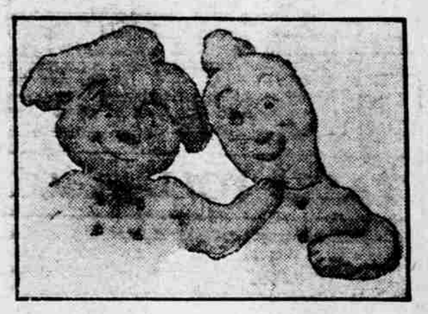
The woman began it, of course. Said she,
"You're the homeliest man in town!
Your head is too large, and your feet too small,
And your color is quite too brown;
And if there is anything I despise,
'Tis a pair of little, black, beady eyes!"

The gingerbread man flew into a rage.
"Just look at yourself!" cried he.
"You are much too fat, and your nose is flat,
And your squint is a sight to see;
While your dress is shockingly out of style,
And every one's tired of that same old smile!"

But never a "next time" came, alas!
To the queer little people in brown.
That very same hour they were introduced
To the best little boy in town.
"I'm delighted to meet such a pair!" quoth he,
And promptly invited them both to tea.

Then the gingerbread woman sobbed so hard
That she cried out one of her eyes,
But he scolded on till he grew quite cracked,
And both of them looked like guys;
When, ashamed of themselves, their anger passed,
And a gingerbread truce was signed at last.

"We never will quarrel again!" cried she,
"For I'm sure it is most absurd,
And with dispositions as sweet as ours
I can't see how it occurred—
Why, you know, my dear, when nothing goes wrong
We are just angelic the whole day long!"



A little while later, when Norah came
To carry the dishes away,
The gingerbread people had disappeared
In gingerbread style, they say,
And a couple of currants rolling round,
With some little brown crumbs, were all she found!